

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 063489

EXDIS

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PE, PI, GS

SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN REACTION TO TERRORIST INCIDENT IN ISRAEL

1. IN CONVERSATION SATURDAY AFTERNOON, MARCH 11, WITH
AMBASSADOR GHORBAL, ATHERTON INFORMED HIM OF THE TERRORIST
ATTACK ON ISRAELI TOURIST BUS, OF WHICH HE HAD NOT BEEN
AWARE. ATHERTON SUGGESTED THAT HE CONSIDER SERIOUSLY
WHAT HE MIGHT RECOMMEND TO HIS GOVERNMENT ABOUT ITS PUBLIC
REACTION TO THIS INCIDENT. PUBLIC OPINION IN THE U.S.
WILL BE WATCHING CLOSELY, AND MANY WILL RECALL THAT ISRAEL
HAD MADE A STATEMENT CONDEMNING TERRORIST ATTACK AGAINST
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EGYPTIANS IN CYPRUS.

2. COMMENT: SATURDAY'S SERIOUS TERRORIST INCIDENT WILL
HAVE DEEP EMOTIONAL IMPACT IN ISRAEL AND CAN ONLY
COMPLICATE EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE RETHINKING IN ISRAEL ABOUT
SOME OF ITS POSITIONS IN CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS, PARTICULARLY
ON DIFFICULT ISSUES RELATING TO PALESTINIAN QUESTION AND

FUTURE OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA. IT IS OBVIOUS THAT A PRIMARY MOTIVE OF PERPETRATORS OF THIS ATTACK IS TO UNDER-MINE THE PEACE PROCESS SET IN MOTION BY PRESIDENT SADAT.

3. AN IMPORTANT OBJECTIVE OF ALL OF OUR EFFORTS IN THE DAYS IMMEDIATELY AHEAD WILL BE TO MINIMIZE THE FALL-OUT FROM THIS INCIDENT, AND FROM THE ALMOST INEVITABLE ISRAELI RETALIATORY ACTION, ON OUR ATTEMPTS TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES TO FUTURE PROGRESS IN THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THIS WILL BE THE ISRAELI AND U.S. PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF THE ATTITUDE OF MODERATE ARAB GOVERNMENTS, ESPECIALLY EGYPT, TOWARD THIS OUTRAGE. WE ARE NOT UNMINDFUL OF THE DILEMMA THIS POSES FOR THE EGYPTIANS, CONSIDERING THEIR ALREADY VULNERABLE POSITION IN THE ARAB WORLD. WE THINK IT NEVERTHELESS IMPORTANT TO GET ACROSS TO THEM HOW IMPORTANT IT IS THAT THEY FIND WAYS TO DISASSOCIATE THEMSELVES FROM THIS TERRORIST ATTACK AND TO CONDEMN IT IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR GENERAL POLICY OF OPPOSITION TO INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM, AND TO GUIDE EGYPTIAN PUBLIC MEDIA ACCORDINGLY. WE LEAVE THIS TO YOU TO HANDLE IN WHATEVER WAY YOU BELIEVE WOULD BE MOST EFFECTIVE. VANCE

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